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CROOKED POKERA Confederate in the Game the  
Device Most Depended  
Upon.

"Real poker players," said the old gambler, "don't stoops with the cards, any more as a rule. Of course there are games in which it is perfectly safe to sack the cards or deal off the bottom or give seconds or even to palm cards and hide them in your sleeve. You can even monkey with the discard and pick out some particular card that may be useful to you if the fellow you are after is a tank sucker and you're sure he isn't able to see what you're doing, but that kind of a chance doesn't come once in a blue moon. The general run of players to-day, at least among those who are likely to stick up against a professional, may not know enough to play tricks of that sort, but they are likely to be well enough posted to detect 'em in case anybody tries it on them."

"Neither are marked cards used as much as they were some years ago," he continued, "and for the same reason. People who do not know much about cards are not so apt to sit in at a professional game as they once were, and those who do know enough to take the chance are liable to know something about the marks, so it isn't safe. Of course, as I said before, there are sometimes opportunities for old trick you may happen to think of."

"However, the world moves, and it isn't to be supposed that men who give their days and nights to the study of the science of card playing would give up such a profitable pursuit as that is just because the primitive old ways of winning have come to be better understood than they were."

"It is a professional's business to know more about his own business, even if it's only a little more, than the average sportsman knows, and accordingly real poker players generally have taken up with the most reliable method there is—keeping the best end of the game in their own hands."

"That of course is to have a confederate sitting in. There's nothing new about that—the old crude ways in which the device was commonly practised have undergone improvement. I can remember when it was an ordinary, everyday occurrence for a couple of turnkeys to meet together and stop at one crossroads tavern after another and clean out the neighborhood after another without getting into serious trouble; and one of the usual methods they employed was to see how any player who happened to sit down was strong before the draw."

"Nowadays a professional who would propose that way of working to another, or himself, would be laughed at, but the practice of having a confederate in the game is more prevalent than ever. The difference is that if, for example, have a side partner in the game I am playing in, I will first make sure that nobody else in the game will have the slightest reason to suppose, either before the game or while it is going on, that I ever spoke to the other man until we sat together."

"Wilkins and Sawyer were certainly up to date players. They didn't try any of the old time tricks on us, and after I had watched them a while I found out that they were destined to play a straight game aside from the advantage they had, thought they had, in knowing each other's hands. Moreover I was soon satisfied that Smith understood the situation exactly as I did, and I felt that we had the real advantage because of the fact that we were supposed to be strangers to each other and therefore sure to play independently."

"That being established, we played

impossible, if you never tried it, to devise a new code for each sitting, but when you come to think that the most commonplace action, such as leaning to one side or the other or knocking the ashes off your cigar, may have a meaning for the man who understands it, you will see that it is simple enough. Of course nobody is going to be so foolish as to use the same signal too frequently, but that is easily guarded against."

"That may seem like undue precaution, but let me tell you that no precaution is too elaborate for use in a game of poker as it is played nowadays among professionals. Smith and I perhaps will be the only two out of the four who understand each other as well as I understand Smith. In that case of course it comes down to a question of the excellence of our play against theirs, but if there is no such combination against us we will have easy picking."

"We won't undertake a crosscut very often; never, unless each of us is strong enough to justify heavy play, for the old device of boasting the third player out and then having one of the partners lay down to the other is too well known."

"But there are plenty of other ways that almost any player will understand of getting an advantage from your confederate's play besides the old seesaw, and I've got a side partner in the game that I can rely on I won't hesitate to play in any game I can find. Only, as I said, I want to be sure that nobody will suspect the partnership."

"Even that draw poker is no sure thing. If a man could discover some thing game of draw poker he wouldn't need anything more in this world. But it's the old story. Nobody on earth can put up anything so strongly and securely that it can't be knocked down by somebody else."

"I saw an instance of that once in a Chicago hotel that was a valuable lesson to me, for the old rule holds good in gambling more than in almost anything else. That is that we learn more from the errors and misfortunes of others than we do from our own."

"I worked well too. We were both very lazy during the daytime, looking after some imaginary affairs, and only showing at the hotel for a late dinner at separate tables. After dinner we'd smoke a while in the corridor and each go to his own room as if tired out with the day's exertions."

"We took no notice of each other, and on the third night we were both approached and we allowed ourselves to be persuaded to play in a small game of poker."

"It was a five handed game, and it didn't take me long to decide that the fifth man had been picked up as we had and that Wilkins and Sawyer, as they called him and his companion, were the ones that were to Smith and me. His name really was Smith to do them. What happened to the fifth man wasn't any concern of ours."

"Wilkins and Sawyer were certainly up to date players. They didn't try any of the old time tricks on us, and after I had watched them a while I found out that they were destined to play a straight game aside from the advantage they had, thought they had, in knowing each other's hands. Moreover I was soon satisfied that Smith understood the situation exactly as I did, and I felt that we had the real advantage because of the fact that we were supposed to be strangers to each other and therefore sure to play independently."

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